

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, UK

SUBJ: MARCH BY-ELECTION THREATENS LABOR MAJORITY

REF: LONDON L9233

1. SUMMARY: THREE BY-ELECTIONS FOR PARLIAMENT WILL BE HELD IN MARCH, OUTCOME OF WHICH COULD ELIMINATE PRESENT LABOR MAJORITY IN HOUSE AND COMPLICATE GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM WITH LOSS OF COMMITTEE CONTROL. END SUM.

2. THREE BY-ELECTIONS HAVE BEEN ANNOUNCED FOR MARCH, OUTCOME OF WHICH COULD JEOPARDIZE LABOR GOVERNMENT'S MAJORITY IN HOUSE OF COMMONS, AND THREATEN GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM.

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3. MOST INTERESTING AND CRITICAL BY-ELECTION TO BE HELD ON MARCH 4 IS COVENTRY-NORTH WEST TO FILL SEAT CAUSED BY DEATH OF LABOR MP MAURICE EDELMAN. IN LAST ELECTION, OCTOBER 1974, EDELMAN WON WITH LABOR MAJORITY OF 7400. CONSERVATIVES ARE ESTIMATING SWING OF MORE THAN 10 PER-CENT WOULD BE REQUIRED TO WIN AND PARTY OFFICIALS ARE HESITANT TO OFFER PROPHECIES, PERHAPS BECAUSE OF ATTRACTIVE LABOR CANDIDATE.

4. THE TWO OTHER BY-ELECTIONS ARE SUTTON-CARSHALTON TO REPLACE RECENTLY ELECTED LORD CARR (LAST CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY OF ALMOST 3700), AND THE WIRRAL TO REPLACE LORD SELWYN-LLOYD (CONSERVATIVE MAJORITY OF 13,400). CONSERVATIVES ARE CONFIDENT WITH REGARD TO THESE TWO SEATS.

5. THUS, LIKELY OUTCOME IS FOR PARTY RETENTION OF SEATS WON IN OCTOBER 1974 WITH OUTSIDE CHANCE OF A CONSERVATIVE GAIN IN COVENTRY. ALL PARTIES, INCLUDING TROUBLED LIBERALS, ARE DEVOTING CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO BY-ELECTION WITH PARTICIPATION OF PARTY LEADERS (THATCHER AND THORPE) AND GOVERNMENT MINISTERS. LIBERALS, FOR EXAMPLE, MIGHT UTILIZE DISAPPOINTING POLL IN TAKING FURTHER DECISIONS ON LEADERSHIP. CONSERVATIVES EXPECT TO MAKE STRONG SHOWING AND PROBABLY HARBOR, SECRETLY, HOPES THAT THEY MAY GAIN COVENTRY AS A RESULT OF UNEMPLOYMENT, DISSATISFACTION WITH LABOR GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE, ESPECIALLY THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED SPENDING CUTS, AND DISCORD IN LABOR PARTY.

6. MATHEMATICS IN SITUATION ARE INTERESTING. WITH THE THREE CURRENT VACANCIES, LABOR HOLDS 318 (INCLUDING SPEAKER), CONSERVATIVES 276, AND REMAINDER (41) UNCHANGED. IF LABOR HOLDS ON TO COVENTRY IT MAINTAINS ITS MAJORITY OF TOTAL SEATS (635) AND THEREBY CONTROL OF COMMITTEES. BUT LOSS OF COVENTRY WILL NOT MEAN LABOR LOSES ITS CAPACITY TO govern, OR THAT A GENERAL ELECTION WOULD BE PREDICATED; IT WOULD CONTINUE TO HOLD A MAJORITY OF ALMOST 40 VOTES OVER THE CONSERVATIVES ALONE WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT AVAILABLE IN MANY CASES FROM THE LIBERALS, SNP, ULSTER, AND WELSH NATIONALISTS.

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